



SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR PARENTS



Idao • Learning Disabilities
Association of Ontario

The right to learn, the power to achieve

What are Learning Disabilities?

What do we mean when we say your child has learning disabilities?

Learning disabilities (LDs) affect one or more of the ways that someone takes in, stores, or uses information, and they occur in spite of average or above average thinking and reasoning abilities. LDs come in many forms and their effects are different from person to person.

LDs can interfere with learning basic skills such as reading, writing, and math. They can also interfere with higher-level skills such as organization, time management and social communication skills.

LDs are long lasting and affect people differently depending on the demands of the environment they are in.

It is important to remember that each person is different and will have their own unique combination of strengths and difficulties. They may have a lot of difficulty in some areas but none or very little in others.

Many struggle with feelings of frustration, a lack of confidence, and low self-esteem. Some may **appear** to be unmotivated or not trying hard enough, when in fact they have become discouraged because they've been struggling so hard.

Individuals with LDs **can** be successful when they have access to specific skill instruction, compensatory strategies, self-advocacy skills and accommodations.



What about ADHD?

Problems with attention and focus can be part of learning disabilities, ADHD, or both. LDs and ADHD are considered to be separate conditions, but many individuals have both diagnoses. A common characteristic of those with LDs or ADHD is difficulty with executive functions. Students rely on executive functions to perform activities such as planning, organizing, strategizing, paying attention to and remembering details, and managing time and space.



First Steps in Seeking Help for Your Child

It is usually parents who first realize that their child learns differently. Trust your instincts. Consult your pediatrician or family doctor to rule out the more obvious problems such as difficulties with vision or hearing.

Children develop differently from one another. It is quite usual that some children are ready for academic learning at age 4, while others are not ready until age 6 or even later. This does not necessarily imply that late bloomers are all going to be identified as needing special education. All parents hope that their children will be taught as they learn best and that if there are some difficulties, the child's teacher will know what to do about this.

In this section, we will outline some of the steps that parents can take when they are concerned about their child in school.

STEP 1: Meet with the Teacher

If your child is not doing well in school, you should request a special interview time with his/her teacher to review in detail your child's progress. Your child's teacher may have valuable insights into his/her strengths and learning needs. In turn, you can share your understanding of your child and his/her needs with the teacher. Some extra help at school and at home may help your child keep up with school work.



STEP 2: School-based Meetings

When a child continues to have difficulties, in spite of the best efforts of the teacher, or if a particular difficulty has been identified by a professional, or where the child is becoming frustrated or discouraged, then it is important to initiate additional help. The formal way of doing this is by referral to a meeting called an IPRC (Identification, Placement and Review Committee), where decisions are made about rights to special education services.

Many school boards have chosen to introduce a pre-IPRC or pre-special education referral process. These are sometimes called a case conference, a school (support) team meeting or a pre-IPRC meeting. In order to find out whether your school board has such a process, you should talk to your child's school principal, and ask for a copy of the *Parents' Guide*. Each school board has a Parents' Guide outlining the special education programs and services available and the process in that board to access these services. If you have a local chapter of LDAO they will be able to explain the local school board process to you, including such information as how long each step usually takes.

The pre-IPRC process is not included in the IPRC regulation or mentioned in any other relevant legislation. Therefore, there is no single consistent process or any rights set out in law, e.g. the right to be present, to take part in discussions, or to appeal decisions of the "team". However, this pre-IPRC process may lead to help for your child more quickly than waiting for the IPRC to take place. It may make sense to hold off on referral to an IPRC until the help and support recommended through a school team meeting are implemented and evaluated, especially if your child is very young, has minor academic problems and what is suggested makes good sense to you.



STEP 3: Assessment

If, in spite of additional help, your child's level of achievement does not improve, it is time to pursue a psychoeducational assessment and/or an IPRC. A psychoeducational assessment (referred to in Ministry of Education Regulation 181 as a "psychological" assessment) can be done through the school board's psychological services department or by a psychologist or psychological associate in private practice. Some school boards do not have their own psychology staff, and use community psychologists on a contract basis. The school must obtain your written consent before a psychological assessment can be done.

In the school system, there are often long waiting periods for psychological assessments. Occasionally assessments are available in a hospital setting and are covered under OHIP, or through a children's mental health centre, if there are emotional/behavioural concerns, but there are long waiting lists in these settings as well. If you have a group medical plan through an employer, you can check to see if assessment by a psychologist is covered and to what maximum fee. You would need a referral from a medical doctor to get coverage under the group plan, but you can refer your child directly to most psychologists/psychological associates. If you use a private psychologist/psychological associate, make sure that they are familiar with writing a report in the format used by the school board.

A good psychological (psychoeducational) assessment should provide information about overall intellectual ability, but more importantly, about strengths and weaknesses. There should be recommendations about specific teaching interventions and ways of using areas of strength to compensate for areas of difficulty. In older children, there should also be recommendations for accommodations and use of technology to bypass weak areas.



STEP 4: IPRC Referral

If there is going to be a significant delay in getting access to psychological assessment, it may be best to proceed with referral to an IPRC. The IPRC committee must obtain and consider an “educational” assessment, but this can be done more quickly, and does not require a parental consent. An educational assessment looks at academic skill levels and can be done by an educator. However, the IPRC committee, when it meets, may decide it needs to obtain and consider a “psychological assessment” in order to make a correct identification and placement decision, and may delay any decisions until then. Some school boards wait to hold the IPRC meeting until there is a psychological assessment report.



Excerpt from “A Parent’s Guide to Special Education”, LDAO, 2003

Working with Your Child's School

Parents are key partners in their children's education. In fact, research has shown that greater family involvement in schools results in better student outcomes in academics, attendance, and attitude. There is even a Parent Engagement Office at the Ontario Ministry of Education that is dedicated to helping parents become involved in their children's education and school community. There are also community organizations that help parents work with their children's school, and some have materials or services available in other languages.

To support your child's education, you'll need to work with the teacher(s) and other educators. To develop a good relationship with the teacher(s) and school, start talking informally about your child as soon as you can, instead of waiting to get in touch when there is a problem. Then you will already know each other if there are problems to discuss.

You can be in touch with the teacher and other school staff by:

- sending notes back and forth
- writing in your child's agenda book
- email (if the school permits this)
- voice mail

Since you know your child best, you have very important insights and information to share. **You can talk about:**

- your child's talents, interests, and strengths
- what your child needs help with
- what strategies work for your child at home
- what motivates your child
- your child's friends
- issues that could affect your child's learning, attention, or feelings, such as:
 - changes in your child's health or behaviour
 - your family's cultural traditions and customs
 - any family issues or changes

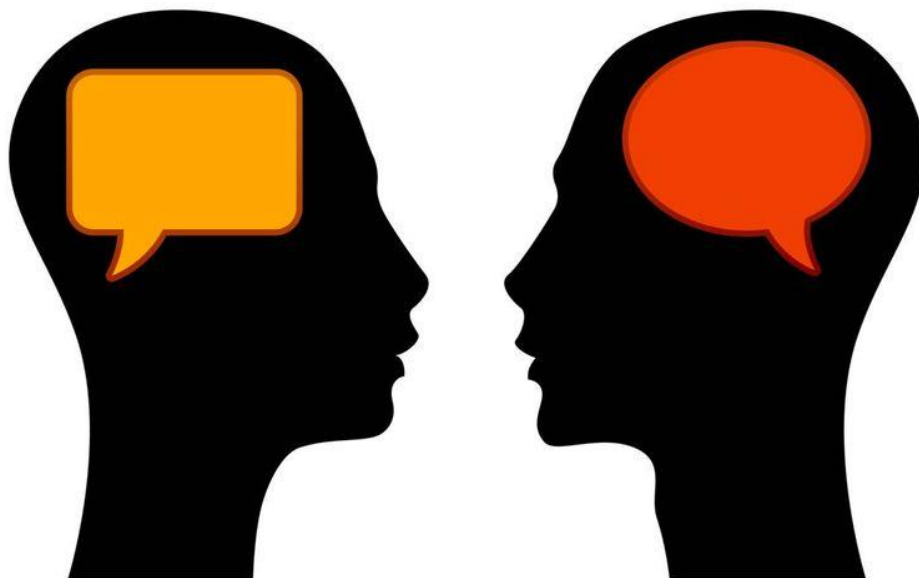


The teacher(s) can tell you:

- what is expected of your child
- how your child is progressing in school work
- how your child is developing socially and emotionally
- how your child behaves in class and the discipline that is used
- about any difficulties your child is having

When communicating with you, ask the teacher(s) to:

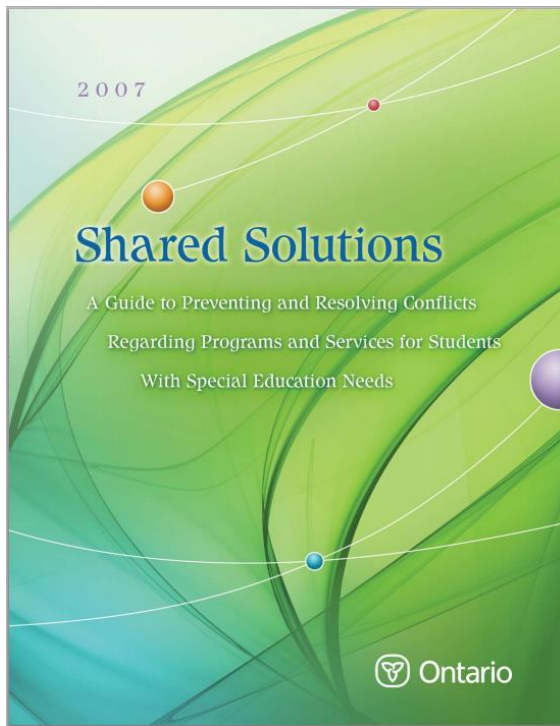
- use plain words, not jargon, so that you can understand what is being discussed
- schedule appointments so that you can have someone come with you—a spouse, family member, friend, or interpreter
- suggest what you can do to help your child
- listen to what works at home
- provide copies of any written reports



PARENT TIP:

Keep notes of all your conversations with the school about your child. If it is hard for you to take notes, ask if you can bring someone with you to take notes for you. It is useful to organize the information you have into a format such as a binder.

Getting help for your child can be a complicated and emotional process; there may be misunderstandings or breakdowns in communication between you and the teacher(s). As frustrated as you may feel, remember there are many good reasons to find a solution, the most important being that this is for the good of your child.



The Ontario Ministry of Education has developed a handbook for parents and teachers called ***Shared Solutions: A Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Programs and Services for Students with Special Education Needs***. This guide contains strategies and techniques to prevent conflicts and to find a ‘shared solution’ to conflicts that develop. [Click here to access the document.](#)

PARENT TIP

Find out whether your school board has a **Communication Protocol**. This document will outline who you should contact with your concerns, starting with the classroom teacher and moving ‘up the ladder’ to others.

Working with Your Child’s School is from LDAO’s free online workshop **IEP 101 for Parents and Students**. [Click here for more information about the workshop.](#)

Opportunities for Home-School Communication

School Event	Purpose of Event	Your Opportunity as a Parent
Back-to-School Night	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn about academic programs • Meet principal and staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a connection with the principal • Learn about school policies, special needs programs, tutoring, clubs, school discipline policy • Request a meeting with the homeroom teacher and principal to share health information
Open House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to visit the school and your child's classroom • Opportunity to meet your child's teacher and learn about his or her progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good time to request a meeting with teacher to share information about your child's learning progress
Parent-Teacher Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First report card review for teacher and you (the parent) to share concerns regarding your child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A time to identify and discuss concerns about learning or behavioral difficulties occurring at school • Develop shared strategies that you and the teacher can use to help your child • Request a written report of topics discussed and suggestions made
Parent-Requested Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For concerns about your child's progress or other school-related issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a list of points you wish to make and questions you wish to ask • Discuss your concerns with your child's teacher • Decide on steps and strategies to help your child • Request a written report of the conference, and a list of topics, suggestions and decisions made

Home-School Communications about Homework

Children with LDs/ADHD often have trouble with homework. It is important to address these problems early, since they can affect school performance. Children with LDs/ADHD often:

- Forget to write down homework assignments.
- Forget to bring home needed books and materials.
- Put off starting homework.
- Become distracted and may not finish homework.
- When they do complete homework, it may be careless and full of mistakes.
- When they return to school, they often forget to hand in assignments.

To help your child with homework, try the following:

- Talk with your child's teacher to establish home-school communication about homework assignments so you know what homework your child has.
- Identify a 'study-buddy' and email address or telephone number to contact in case your child forgot to write down the assignment.
- Use a schedule and routine. Make sure your child does homework at the same time every night.
- Establish a homework place that is separate from play space or eating space. When personal work space is not possible and homework has to be done at the family table, use a special table cloth for each child to indicate "homework space" and remove it as soon as homework is completed.
- Help your child to organize their desk or work area.
- Keep visual reminders of what your child needs to do, including checklists, to-do lists, homework diary and a calendar.
- Help your child start the homework by sitting down for a moment and asking him/her to tell you what he/she has to do. Make sure your child understands the question and knows the first one or two steps. Walk away and let your child continue to do the homework alone.
- Help your child cope with a lengthy assignment by breaking it into smaller time-chunks. Use a count-down timer that can be set for the agreed-upon time-chunks and task-chunks (e.g., 10 minutes), with brief mini-breaks (e.g., one minute).
- Set up a reward system to provide positive reinforcement for completing homework.
- Colour it bright! Use a large fluorescent or brightly coloured binder or envelope for things that have to go back and forth between home and school (e.g., homework, permission slips, notes, etc.). Help your child choose a colour that can be seen easily when it is inside their backpack!
- For younger children use rhymes to help them remember routines: Unpack the backpack; work on the table, not on the floor! Pack up the backpack; put backpack back by the door!

A Parent's Guide to the IPRC and IEP



Understanding the IPRC

The Education Act in Ontario requires that school boards provide, or purchase from another school board, special education programs and services for “exceptional” students. Exceptional students are defined as those whose “behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical, or multiple exceptionalities are such that they are considered to need placement in a special education program.”

The role of the IPRC is to:

- 1) decide whether or not your child should be identified as exceptional;
- 2) identify the areas of your child's exceptionality;
- 3) decide an appropriate placement; and
- 4) review the identification and placement at least once each school year.

To start an IPRC, you must contact your child's principal, in writing, and request that your child be referred to an IPRC. Your child's principal may also make the referral on his or her own initiative. Within 15 school days of making the referral, the principal must send you written notification, including an approximate date of the IPRC meeting and a parent's guide containing information about the IPRC. The principal may also ask you for permission to obtain a psychological or health assessment of your child. While an educational assessment will also be performed, parental permission is not required for this.

At least 10 school days before the IPRC is to meet, you (and your child, if 16 or over) will receive written notice of the meeting and an invitation to attend. This letter will list the date, time, and place of the meeting, and will ask you to indicate if you can attend. Before the IPRC meets, you will also receive a copy of all information that the chair of the IPRC has received.

If you can't attend this meeting, contact the school principal immediately to arrange an alternative date or to let the principal know that you will not be attending. If, however, you cannot attend, the IPRC's written decision will be sent to you.

Either you or your child's principal may make a request for others to attend the IPRC meeting. As well, you are entitled to have a representative or advocate who may speak on your behalf.

What Happens at the Meeting?

After introductions are made, the IPRC reviews all available information about your child. They consider the educational assessments and the health or psychological assessments, if these were obtained. If they feel it will be useful, they may also interview your child (with your permission, if your child is under 16 years of age). They will also consider any information that you submit about your child or that the child, if 16 or over, submits on his or her own behalf. You are encouraged to ask questions during this meeting and to participate in any discussion.

Once all of the information has been presented and discussed, the committee will make its decision. This decision will include:

- whether or not the child is exceptional;
- if exceptional, the category and definition of the exceptionality;
- the strengths and needs of the student;
- the placement of the student. The IPRC will recommend placement in a regular class with special education services if, in the Committee's opinion, such a placement meets the student's needs and is consistent with the parent's preferences. Note that while the IPRC will consider the parent's preferences, these preferences are not binding, and the final decision about placement belongs to the IPRC.
- the IPRC's recommendations regarding a special education program and services; and
- where appropriate, the reasons for placing your child in a special education class.

What Happens Next?

You will receive a written statement of the IPRC's decision. If you did not attend the meeting, this will be mailed to you. You will be asked to sign this document to indicate that you agree with the IPRC's decisions and recommendations. If you attended the meeting, you may be asked to sign at that time, but it is wise to wait. You have 30 school days to return the signed document to the IPRC. Once the document is signed and returned, the board will promptly notify the principal of the school at which the special education program is to be provided. That principal will then begin the process of developing your child's Individual Education Plan (IEP).



What If I Disagree with the Decision?

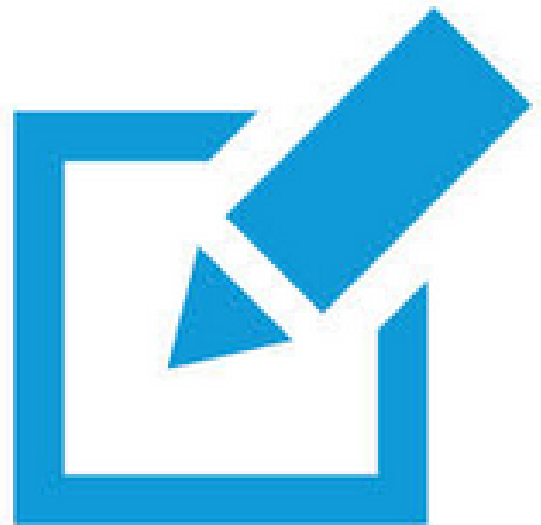
If you disagree with the IPRC's decision, you have 15 school days to request a second meeting of the IPRC. If, after your second meeting, you are still dissatisfied, you have 15 school days from the second decision to file an appeal. Your request for an appeal must be made in writing to the secretary of the school board (the name and address of this person can be obtained from your child's principal). You must indicate the decision(s) with which you disagree and your reasons for disagreeing. If you disagree with the original decision but do not request a second meeting or file an appeal, the decision of the IPRC will automatically be implemented after 30 school days.

The Annual Review – Or Sooner

A review IPRC meeting will be held each year, during which your child's progress may be reviewed and the education plan revised. This review may be waived only with your written permission, and it is recommended that you do not waive this review. The annual IPRC is your chance to help ensure that your child begins each new school year in the most appropriate environment and with the most effective accommodations available.

You may also request a review IPRC any time after your child has been in a special education program for 3 months.

Once a final decision about placement has been made, the next step is the creation of your child's Individual Education Plan (IEP).



The Individual Education Plan (IEP)

The Individual Education Plan, commonly known as the IEP, is the school's written plan of action for the special education student. According to the Ministry of Education, the IEP "is a working document which describes the strengths and needs of an individual exceptional pupil, the special education program and services established to meet that pupil's needs, and how the program and services will be delivered. It also describes the student's progress."

An IEP must be prepared for all students who have been identified through the IPRC process, and a copy of this document must be provided to the parents (and the student, if 16 or over). IEPs may be prepared without the prerequisite of an IPRC, and some schools are suggesting that parents of special needs students take this route. While there is a clear benefit in avoiding the delay of waiting for an IPRC meeting, it is important to note that the IEP is not binding without the IPRC. Despite the best efforts and intentions of your child's school, the written decision of the IPRC is the only guarantee that your child will receive the services he or she requires.

Within 30 school days of the student's placement in the special education program by an IPRC decision, the principal must ensure that the IEP is completed and a copy sent to the parent (and student, if 16 or over). The IEP team should ensure that everyone involved with the student is aware of the contents and requirements of the IEP.

Reviewing and Updating the Plan

A formal review and update of the IEP should take place at least once every reporting period; and team members should continuously monitor and adjust the plan as necessary.

Want to know more about IEPs? Check out LDAO's **FREE** online course ***IEP 101 for Parents and Students.***

[Click here to find out more!](#)

How to be a Successful Advocate for Your Child

General Guidelines

- **Go to every meeting at the school** when your child's progress, needs and future are to be discussed. Show interest and be willing to both learn and teach. Ask for pointers on helping your child at home. Participate in working out the ways she/he will be dealt with at school. If you promise to do something, then do it. A parent with a reputation for being caring, concerned, reliable and involved has the respect of the professionals. It may be sad, but it is certainly true that if a child needs the benefit of doubt, the child of the respected parent is more likely to get it.
- **Keep files on your child.** Keep a copy of every letter you send, as well as those you receive. Make and keep notes on telephone conversations, and send letters confirming the important parts of those conversations. Keep report cards, assessment reports and review reports in the file. You may never need them, but if you do, for example, for the purposes of going to appeal or tribunal, you will have them.
- **Work with your child's teacher.** Share information on your child's needs as well as on approaches that have worked for you at home. It is unrealistic to expect a child to do things she/he genuinely cannot do, but it's equally unrealistic to excuse a child from doing things she/he can do. If you back the teacher when she/he is making a reasonable demand, she/he is more likely to listen to you when you make suggestions and ask for changes.
- **Be sure that you know your rights and responsibilities.** You should be well informed, assertive, persistent, but also courteous and respectful towards those who represent the school board and who are entrusted with teaching your child.
- **Involve your child as much and as early in the process as is possible.** By the time she/he is 16, she/he is expected to participate reasonably independently. By 18, the IPRC process is the sole responsibility of the student. It is up to you to ensure that she/he is ready to become an effective self-advocate well before these milestone ages are reached.



What it means to be an effective advocate

- Being informed about the Education Act and Regulations, your school board's plans and resources and what learning disabilities are.
- Being an advocate at all times, not just when it is comfortable to be so.
- Being assertive and communicating well with the educational system.
- Being persistent, which does not mean being a pest, but it does mean not giving up at the first sign of difficulty.
- Being realistic about your child's strengths and needs and about present and future prospects for your child.
- Recognizing that there is strength in numbers and joining an advocacy group such as LDAO which can help you and may lead to you being able to help others later.
- Accepting that as parents who are effective advocates, you may not be popular with the educational system all the time.
- Accepting that as parents you must encourage your children to acquire the skills of self-advocacy and then learn to let go.



What it means to be assertive

Assertiveness is:

- **Knowing, understanding and accepting your rights** and your child's rights and the accompanying responsibilities;
- **Asking questions** to achieve full clarification and repeating the question until it is satisfactorily answered;
- **Attending and participating fully in all school meetings** where your child's educational progress is being discussed, and participating fully in the process;
- **Keeping a full record of all communications regarding your child**, including knowing who provided what and when and to whom;
- **Ensuring that you know what is in the school's plan for your child's education** this school year, including goals, objectives, and activities and being able to discuss any of these at any time that your child's progress is being reviewed;
- **Letting people know**, courteously but firmly, that you intend to resolve issues to ensure that your child is learning and that you are willing, if necessary and as a last resort, to pursue appeal procedures;
- **Learning who the key people are** and who can help you ensure that your child is learning to the best of his or her abilities;
- **Knowing when to thank and praise people** who have helped, in a positive manner;
- **Never saying "Oh, I'm just a parent, so what do I know?"**



LDAO Chapters

Local chapters of the LDAO exist in many of Ontario's cities, and each offers services centred around education and advocacy for people of all ages. To locate your local chapter and learn about what they offer, look through the list below and contact the one nearest you.

LDA Chatham-Kent

Tel: (519) 352-2024

E-mail: ldack@netrover.com

Website: www.ldchatham-kent.org

LDA Durham Region

Tel: (905) 426-1442

Website: www.ldadr.on.ca

E-mail: info@ldadr.on.ca

LDA Halton

Tel: (905) 333-1977

Website: www.ldahalton.ca

Email: info@LDAhalton.ca

LDA Kingston

Tel: (613) 546-8524

E-mail: ldak@ldakingston.com

Website: www.ldakingston.com

LDA Lambton County

Tel: (519) 344-4919

E-mail: ldalc.info@gmail.com

Website: www.sarnia.com/groups/lda-lc

LDA London Region

Tel: (519) 438-6213

E-mail: ldainfo@ldalondon.ca

Website: www.ldalondon.ca

LDA Niagara

Tel: (905) 641-1021

E-mail: ldaniagara@cogeco.net

Website: www.ldaniagara.org

LDA Ottawa-Carleton

Tel: 613-567-5864

E-mail: info@ldaottawa.com

Website: www.laottawa.com

LDA Peel Region

Tel: (905) 272-4100

E-mail: info@ldapr.ca

Website: www.ldapr.ca

LDA Sudbury

Tel: (705) 522-0100

E-mail: info@ldasudbury.ca

Website: www.ldasudbury.ca

North Bay & Area Services

Tel: (705) 476-5437

Email:

ldaonorthbay@gmail.com

Sault Ste. Marie & District Services

Tel: (705) 759-2554 ext. 2713

Email: ldaossm@gmail.com

LDA Thunder Bay

Tel: (807) 345-6595, ext. 160

E-mail: ldatbay@shaw.ca

LDA Toronto District

Tel: (416) 229 -1680

E-mail: admin@ldatd.on.ca

Website: www.ldatd.on.ca

LDA Wellington County

Tel: (519) 837-2050

E-mail: info@ldawc.ca

Website: www.ldawc.ca

LDA Windsor-Essex County

Tel: 519-252-7889

E-mail: info@ldawe.ca

Website: www.ldawe.ca

LDA York Region

Tel: (905) 884-7933

E-mail: info@ldayr.org

Website: www.ldayr.org

Become an LDAO Member!

Become a member of LDAO and share in the rewards of supporting individuals and families with learning disabilities. At the provincial level, your support enables LDAO to produce new resources for parents and professionals on a variety of pertinent and timely topics; to dialogue with relevant Ontario Ministries that deal with our exceptional population; and to make the public more aware of and empathetic to those affected by learning disabilities.

Your membership to LDAO automatically affiliates you with a local chapter. Our 15 chapters are run by dedicated staff and a volunteer Board of Directors. They are people, like yourself, who dedicate their time and efforts to ensure that people with learning disabilities are enabled to reach their full potential. There is a wealth of information available to you through your chapter. Various types of services may be available in your community. More specific information on local programmes can be obtained from your chapter.

Additional Benefits

- You will also receive our newsletter [Communiqué](#), published twice per year in both print and electronic formats.
- You will also be able to get discounts on most online courses, webinars, and workshops!

[Click here to fill out a membership form.](#)

Thank you for your support.